Detrick, Fever Link Queried

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A prominent medical journal has raised the question of whether the current outbreak of Rocky Mountain spotted fever in Maryland is linked to experiments with the disease at Ft. Detrick in Frederick.

However, officials of the State Health Department, the National Communicable Disease Center in Atlanta and Ft. Detrick yesterday ruled out the possibility that the biological warfare center's research activities and the large number of Rocky Mountain spotted fever cases are connected.

The question of Detrick's possible involvement was raised in the July 18 issue of Medical World News, a medical news publication written in lay language and distributed without charge to physicians, medical students and writers.

The unsigned article was entitled, "Tick Fever Time, and Not Just in the Rockies." After detailing the case of a 14-year-old Frederick girl, Poppy Fremer, who came down with Rocky Mountain spotted fever in June, the article states:

"Contrary to popular impression—shaped by many physicians—this tick-borne rickettsial disease is no longer concentrated in the Rockies. In fact, since the mid 1940's, an increasing majority of cases have occurred east of the Mississippi River. Maryland appears to lead the Nation . . ."

Cases Have Doubled

Rocky Mountain spotted fever cases in the U.S. have almost doubled since last year. As of yesterday, Maryland has reported three deaths in 34 cases in the State this year. Virginia lists four deaths in 35 cases.

Frederick County, in which Ft. Detrick is located, had six cases of the disease, as did Anne Arundel and Carroll counties in Maryland. Suburban Montgomery and Prince George's counties each had two cases. In Virginia, Fairfax County topped the State with five cases reported.

Both states claim the outbreak of spotted fever is the worst in 20 years.

Question on Increase

In asking why there has been an increase in Rocky Mountain spotted fever in Maryland, the Medical World News article states:

"One jagged question pointed to Ft. Detrick, which is only nine miles from the Schipper farm (where the girl encountered a tick). Center for major Army biological warfare programs, Ft. Detrick experiments with Rocky Mountain spotted fever.

"But Dr. Arnold G. Wedum, director of industrial health and safety, manitains that 'there has never been a member of the general public infected from any of the activities here'. . ."

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Ft. Detrick, Fever Link Questioned

DISEASE, From B1

The article notes that the dog tick and wood tick carry Rocky Mountain spotted fever. The incubation period, it states, is from 2 to 12 days and the disease cannot be transmitted from man to man.

A Detrick spokesman confirmed the article's assertion that the installation has had five Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever cases—one in 1957, two in 1959, one in 1964 and one in 1965. Information as to when Detrick began experimenting with Rocky Mounatin Spotted Fever was termed "classified."

Detrick first opened in 1943, about the time the article states that tick fever increased in the East.

However, Dr. Charles C. Shepard, chief of the leprosy and rickettsial diseases unit of the National Communicable Disease Center in Atlanta, said there was no connection between the two events and no link between Detrick's experiments and the high number of recent cases in the area.

Shepard pointed out the desease was first recognized in the Eastern United States "about 1930," but that it had been present in the East before then, usually diagnosed as "black measles."

The great increase in cases this year, he said, is probably due to greater exposure by people to dog ticks and wood ticks.

Dr. Kenneth Crawford, public health veterinarian for Maryland, said there "is absolutely no possiblility Ft. Detrick could be involved because tick fever follows the pattern of tick concentration throughout the State."